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VERSES AND VERSICLES

BY

SIR GEORGE RADFORD



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VERSES AND VERSICLES



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BY

Heyms

SIR GEORGE RADFORD



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ADELPHI TERRACE

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“For this relief much thanks.”

SOME of these verses have appeared before in the “Westminster Gazette” and other periodical publications. To the proprietors of these publications I express my thanks for permission to republish such of the verses as were originally published before 1 July 1912. With regard to those published subsequently I express my thanks to the Legislature for the Copyright Act 1911, which enables an author to republish his own compositions without asking permission of anyone.

VERSES AND VERSICLES



CONTENTMENT

I DO not ask three acres and a cow,
Though that it seems is merit's minimum.
Half that estate or less contents me now,
And if I want some milk (to mix with rum
On winter mornings) I've discovered how
To buy the fluid for a trifling sum.
I'd rather hail, like Jack's all-tattered priest,
A milkmaid than a crumple-hornèd beast.

So I renounce immoderate desire
And to my having nothing seek to add:
An acre and some trees, a leafy choir
And nesting-place for birds whose song makes glad
The present singer who will oft retire
Beneath the shade, and silent there not sad,
Observe his homestead or survey the sky
Between the leaves that meet and part on high.

CONTENTMENT

And then there is of course a velvet lawn
Which sun and shade impress with shifting hue,
And there (I'm told) the thrushes walk at dawn
And meet their friends and take a snack or two—
An hour when "early Christians" only yawn
And wonder what on earth they are to do—
A house, too, fair and square, a roomy dwelling
Which I should highly praise—if I were selling.

And therein adequate accommodation
For sleeping, dining, gossip and what not,
And what concerns me more, an aggregation
Of curious books, a miscellaneous lot
Without apparent sequence or relation
But each one feeds some craving that I've got
Or had; and so they constantly delight me
While richer shelves bewilder or affright me.

The household gear not fashioned for display,
Some drawn from pleasant homes of long ago,
And some produced by craftsmen of to-day,
But all for use and comfort here below,
And spoils of travel fetched from far away
From Teneriffe, Tangier or Jericho,
And paintings that recall familiar faces
And sunny scenes from unforgotten places.

And for inhabitants, besides the swallows
Who build all welcome underneath my eaves,
A cheerful wife (the celibate who wallows
In solitary luxury achieves
But disillusion; no contentment follows
The specious plans his careful fancy weaves.
This is a truth experience enforces:
I know I'm right because I've tried both courses).

Some children too, to make a joyful noise,
A shapely smiling crew to whom each sense
Is mere delight, frank girls and jovial boys
Who love and say so, knowing no pretence,
Their mates, their meals, themselves, their simple toys.
And then their thirst for knowledge is immense,
I therefore find them excellent society
—And only seek an adult for variety.

And when a busy friend arrives from town
And tells me, as he samples my cigars,
How many strive, how most are beaten down,
How very few by skill or lucky stars,
Or guile, attain to fortune or renown,
And these, though victors, carry ugly scars,
I love the easy nymph Contentment more
Because she drives Ambition from my door.

1888.

THE VOLUNTEER

I SING the days before Efficiency
 Transformed the gay Victorian Volunteer
 Who, as recruit, kept (intermittently)
 His thirty drills in one revolving year,
 And, yearly too, with equanimity
 Discharged his sixty rounds at Ranges near
 Or maybe distant, but 'twas no disgrace
 To blaze one's ammunition into space.

And sometimes moved by military zeal
 Went into camp and learned to pitch his tent,
 And sleep therein on mattress hard as deal
 With comrades in the same predicament,
 Ranged like converging spokes around a wheel
 Some sleepless, others loudly somnolent,
 But all at bugle's call, wash, shave, and dress
Alfresco, with becoming sprightliness.

Ten summer days of drill men underwent,
 And learned manœuvres in a leafy park,
 And what "advance in open order" meant,
 And then "marched past" some warrior of mark

Who praised the Corps to their entire content.

Later, when day succumbed to dusk and dark,
Surprising songs with choruses between
Arose from heroes thronging the canteen.

And now his "military age" has fled,

He lives to see his country's arms prevail.
He pays his taxes and he keeps his head
Unswayed by any journalistic gale,
And though vituperation spawn and spread
Ignores Thersites, and his Daily Rail.
No time, no talk, his ancient spirit quenches
Whose more efficient sons now man the trenches.

1916.

THE HERO

I 'VE read, and won't deny the proposition,
 That all the human race are somehow brothers.
 Like all great truths this somewhat lacks precision,
 Embracing (as it seems) our Aunts and Mothers.
 We poets are more nice and make division,
 Discriminating heroes from the others.
 "The others" form a worthy multitude
 But for poetic treatment are no good.

But heroes are we know extremely rare
 Occurring, like the Phoenix, once an age.
 A lucky mother then contrives to bear
 A babe whose latent powers elude the sage,
 But who in time rewards his mother's care
 By filling worthily a poet's page
 Telling his noble deeds in lofty rhyme
 And he, like Agamemnon, weathers time.

Heroes preceding Agamemnon's days
 Remain unknown because they lacked a bard
 To register their names and sing their praise.
 At least so Horace says, but I discard

His dictum, for Oblivion may erase
Hero and singer, both alike ill-starred.
Besides a piffling poet oft survives
By linking paltry lines with better lives.

But to resume. If you should here request—
Presuming on this easy octave style
Which courts digression and impels the best
Of poets to meander for a while—
If you should ask me to define and test
My notion of a hero, I should smile,
And pensively prepare a definition
To satisfy your want and my ambition.

A hero, I should say, requires some brains,
Though not perhaps as much as you expect.
He should have passion too. He thereby gains
A prompt ally to jog his intellect,
And sensibility to joys and pains,
And if you take the trouble to dissect
The hero's character I think you'll find
Some other points of an uncommon kind.

But one thing I'm prepared to guarantee
You'll find in each heroic composition,
However varying other things may be,
And that's a potent will that claims submission

From all of unheroic quality,
And yet like Lucifer accepts perdition
Rather than servitude however slender—
In short your hero never will surrender.

He has one purpose which directs his course
And all his acts are governed to one end.
Both humdrum men and hostile feel his force
And bow before the man they cannot bend:
And things inanimate know no resource
To hinder him, but are compelled to lend
Their impetus to his discreet control
And so your conquering hero gains his goal.

1886.

THE NATIONAL LIBERAL CLUB

BE of good cheer, my brothers in distress,
 And listen not to whimpering discontent,
 For war's designs and martial business
 Possess our Club with our entire consent.
 Our country's arms move surely to success,
 While we congratulate the Government
Although they commandeered our pleasant quarters
 And filled our haunts with cards and clerks and sorters.

But summary eviction, though no joke,
 Whether you rent a palace or a cot,
 Found in the N.L.C. no feeble folk
 But men of action, prompt and on the spot
 To meet misfortune with a counter-stroke,
 Who found a dwelling suited to our lot
 Pending the War—however long the Huns
 Elect to face the music of our guns.

And, exiles now, our sober hats we hang
 In novel halls, and hear our fellows there
 Discuss the Kaiser and his guilty gang
 And chat and keep their friendships in repair.

So we endure, if not without a pang,
With Christian fortitude the ills we bear,
Hoping that Peace will come with expedition,
Restore our home—and end the Coalition.

1916.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE
JOHNSON CLUB MSS.

TO Goldsmith's feast each diner was invited
 To bring himself and his engaging qualities.
 'Twas known that if but two such guests united
 In solid talk or humorous frivolities
 They entertained themselves and were delighted.
 Our Club bids us, besides our personalities,
 To bring sometimes to Cestrian Cheese or Mitre
 A block from Boswell fashioned by the writer.

I say "from Boswell," for his life remains
 (As annotated by our Birkbeck Hill),
 The great Johnsonian mine, though poorer veins
 Yield scanty gold to labourers of skill.
 But, what or whence the metal he obtains,
 The craftsman, having shaped it to his will,
 Displays his product to the Brethren, who
 Pronounce their judgement without more ado.

For some denounce the writer, some defend;
 And some bowl straight, and some deliver wibes
 (Excuse the metaphors, a dubious blend)
 One rhetoric, one raillery provides;

And while some criticize and some commend,
Each Brother says his say, and all take sides,
Save one, who through the intellectual scrimmage
Sits still and silent as a graven image.

So papers post-cœnatically read,
Churchwarden clays and bowls of punch combined
To one high purpose, which, as Johnson said,
Is fellowship and free Exchange of Mind.
The warm and nimble humours long have fled
And left but clammy manuscripts behind.
But print the copy. Some old heart may glow
Recalling merry nights of long ago.

1899.

OBITER DICTA

GO, little book (as one has said before),
But follow not the books of nowadays
Like sturdy beggars beating every door,
 Importunate of purchasers and praise:
But lonely go, and unannounced explore
 The callous crowd for one who smiling says:
“I know your nameless author—Welcome here!”
Then hug his shelf and rest for many a year.

1884.

TO MY OLD NURSE

SELINA, if I use your Christian name,
 Forgive the freedom for I know no other,
 Do you remember how you haply came
 To act as nurse for me and my young brother
 And we received you as a sprightly dame
 Accredited as regent of my mother,
 And walked with you on mornings bright and sunny,
 And plagued you (you alleged) more than your money?

Much of our learning we acquired from you.
 Old proverbs, artless riddles, rustic lore,
 You quoted freely as we sauntered through
 The Five Fields (which, alas, are fields no more)
 Or the cemetery, a dreary rendezvous
 Which you were always ready to explore,
 And all we saw with juvenile delight
 You marked and commented upon at sight.

You urged the snail to show his hornèd head
 And chaunted all his sad domestic news.
 You knew what Mother Slipper-Slopper said
 The night the fox purloined the old gray goose;

And why belated folk were piskey-led
And spent all night in wearing out their shoes,
And how a Devonport urchin's chance grimace
Was stereotyped upon his mobile face.

The long-horned tawny cattle shipped from Spain
You showed us from behind some sheltering gate—
And always wondered whether they were sane.
Of vagrant pigs you'd diagnose the weight.
The alien boys in sabots you'd maintain
Were Spanish, as their onions indicate.
You'd sometimes lead us to the modest shops
Where liquorice lurked, Bath-pipe and acid drops.

The foreigners who stalked the town in gray,
Escorted by the Red-coats of the Queen,
Were Russian prisoners, nothing loth to stay
While nourished from an excellent canteen,
And earning money for a rainy day
By carving figures sold as soon as seen.
Your patriotism was warm, and kindled mine
For you'd a sweetheart in the fighting line.

I often wondered why you'd halt to hear
Old Mother Forty-cats denounce the boys,
Or grim Vandagram's eloquence austere,
Or any other form of vocal noise.

TO MY OLD NURSE

I own I thought your taste in this was queer,
Myself preferring less tumultuous joys—
But reminiscences recur in plenty
Of days when I was four and you were twenty.

1913.

TO MY FRIEND A. B. URGING
HIM TO PRINT

THE talk began upon the lawn,
It flagged at dinner, as was meet,
Then filled the pleasant hours that fleet
Between the dinner and the dawn.

The aims of thought, the joys of sense,
The songs that later bards have sung,
Such were our themes, but yours the tongue
That gave our meaning eloquence.

And as you passed with growing force
From point to point our weeds grew cold;
Intent we listened while you rolled
The sweeping, cyclical discourse.

That night is gone, but give the press
The scraps that memory may retain,
That we may live the night again
And strangers share our happiness.

Admit the strangers. Thus when comes
An end of breakfast, well content
We rise with air benevolent,
And let the sparrows take the crumbs.

1884.

TO A. S. W. : AN INVITATION
TO BLANKENBERGHE

COME, Alfred, leave your cares at home
And seek this friendly Flemish strand,
Where sandhills intercept the foam
Which else would overbear the land.

Here sea and sun and sea-borne breeze
Will give your life a novel zest;
Here pessimists inhale with ease,
And hint that all is for the best.

Here Flemings, Frenchmen, Germans flock,
And English—each a welcome guest—
And all live neighbourly, and mock
At international unrest.

And you shall join the cheerful crew
Who daily bathe and dine and dance
And in the intervals pursue
Studies of high significance,

Striving to find the fairest face
Of maiden gay or matron grave;
Who leads the dance with most of grace
And who most boldly breasts the wave.

Or if the graver mood prevails
We'll leave the giddy company,
And watch the sunlight gild the sails
That navigate an opal sea;

And still converse, and only pause
To light contemplative cigars,
While night comes on and darkness draws
The sheen from all the silent stars.

1887.

TO W. J. C. ON HIS APPROACHING
MARRIAGE

AS nears the day expected long,
Your natural gladness overflows
And spreads to all the friendly throng
Who wish you joy in verse and prose,

Desiring for your future course
Beyond the happy wedding day
Advance of fame, increase of force,
And bridal music all the way.

And one who sauntered by your side
And followed you in many frays
Will some day frankly tell the Bride
(When half-inclined to hear your praise)

How strong you were in every strain,
How equable in every mood;
How disregarding private gain
You ever sought the general good;

How through the dust of public life,
Erect and resolute you pressed
To succour Progress in her strife
With prejudice and interest.

And touched men's broader sympathies,
And made your followers your friends,
And strengthened thus the pleasant ties
Of common zeal for public ends;

And speaking with serene effect
The bitter from debate expelled,
And made the Enemy respect
Your strong convictions firmly held.

So when through sultry party heat,
Dividing on the close event,
We bore you to the Civic Seat,
The Ayes and Noes were both Content.

Nor only then, but through your term
Applause arose with one consent,
While courteous, dignified, and firm,
You guided London's Parliament.

1898.

IN MEMORIAM G. BIRKBECK HILL

SOCIETATIS JOHNSONIANAE OLIM PRIORIS
 QUI OBIT 3 MARCH 1903

WE come together as before
 And gladness kindles at our board,
 But yet we think with one accord
 Of one who comes to us no more;

Of one who lived and linked his name
 With learning, wit and gentleness,
 And was (the world will say no less)
 Custodian of Johnson's fame.

His Master's journeys he pursued
 From Fleet Street to the Hebrides
 And far more arduous than these
 The zigzags of his mind and mood.

Unmoved, encountered critics' slur,
 And never answered them in kind,
 Nor harboured malice in his mind
 Towards plagiary or publisher.

He never stooped to scarify
The solemn bore or tedious wit,
His just resentment only lit
The transient twinkle in his eye.

Lightly he bore his learning's load,
And shared it with his needy friends,
Like one who generously lends
And keeps no score of what is owed.

And to the last his warm goodwill
Kept all his friendships in repair—
And we beside his vacant chair
Deplore a gap no sage can fill.

1903.

SUNRISE IN THE ALPS

WHEN from the east sprung, the lusty Sun
Kisses the Jungfrau, and she makes no noise,
Then up the slopes the sturdy Alpine boys
And kerchiefed maidens, stealing one by one
From scattered châteaux, drive their flocks that run
Behind their tinkling wethers, leaders true,
Intent on pastures steeped in morning dew;
Then too the wary climber learns to shun
The siren sleep, and many a shady mile
He measures unperspiring, ere the sight
Of the near summit moves exultant smile
And all is life and energy and light.
This sort of thing occurs at dawn, while deep
The present writer lies in dreamless sleep.

1873.

THE SCHILTHORN

AT noon I reached the summit, puffed but proud,
 And looking northward noted far below,
 Like a gray garment cast upon the snow,
 The peak's gaunt shadow on a sea of cloud;
My shadow outlined too, the head endowed
 With colours such as April rainbow's show,
 And blessed Saints translated long ago.
 All sanctity I meekly disavowed,
 (Though Benvenuto¹ in like case did not)
 But murmured when a maiden at my side
 Denied my nimbus, boldly claiming what
 She called an aureole, which I denied,
 But when our heads impinging filled one spot
 Then each confessed that both were glorified.

1913.

¹ See "Life of Benvenuto Cellini," Bk. I, chap. cxxviii.

ALPINE OUTRAGE

MY ice-axe which for half a score of years
Has shared my triumphs and preserved my life,
Companion nearer than my child or wife
(High altitudes repel domestic dears),
At last has suffered wrong too deep for tears.
I left her in a place of vulgar strife,
A *salle à manger*, where the sound of knife
And fork and strident voices dinned my ears.
A maid removed her to a rack and thence
A brutal porter bore her to a smith,
Who in the hope of squalid recompense
Branded her comely shaft in spiral with
The names of *Righi, Grindelwald, Lucerne,*
Pilatus, Interlaken, Zurich, Berne.

1911.

A NIGHT AT THE CABANE
BRITANNIA

FIVE thousand feet we climbed by zigzag ways,
Rock and moraine and tracts of ice and snow,
And reached at dusk the Cabane which we owe
To British climbers of these latter days.
Supper dispatched we issued forth to gaze
On cloudless sky enriched with gleam and glow
Of everlasting silent stars, and so
Turned in, in quest of sleep that toil repays.
Vain quest! Wood sawing, doors that slam and slide,
Nailed boots in movement, voices in despair,
Shouts of defiance, threats of homicide,
Conspire to murder sleep, and fright the air,
While the few sleepers (who all sleep denied)
Snored inharmonious through the whole affair.

1912.

CASABLANCA

A WHITE-WALLED city by an azure sea,
Where from the minaret five times a day
The blind muddin the Faithful calls to pray;
But stubborn Jews (and many Jews there be)
Unheeding pass intent on usury.

And the few Christians, exiles here of gain,
Employ industrious natives, and retain
(As is their wont) the bulk of Labour's fee.

And laden camels throng the City gate,
And thread the narrow streets where turbanned Moor,
Berber, and Negro jostle and debate
Their wordly business, careless of the poor
And saintly Marabout, half-clad, unshod,
Who shouts incessantly the name of God.

1900.

SHAKESPEARE'S ARMS

A SABLE bend upon a golden field,
 And on the bend a golden spear; for crest
 A falcon, wings displayed, whose talons wield
 And maybe shake a spear, and so suggest,
 In apt heraldic cant the bearer's name.

These arms conferred on Shakespeare's needy sire,
 Both he and his posterity became

(Including William) gentry of the shire.

Who knows why Shakespeare sought the grant of arms
 (And paid the fees) as learned men declare?

Did he who sways mankind, and swaying charms,

He, peer and prince of spirits high and rare,
 Once reckon it amongst his least desires
 To sit armigerous beside the Squires?

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

A DARK young wife forsook her lawful spouse,
And wooed a married bard and won him too,
And each while to a wedded mate untrue,
Swore to the other truth with solemn vows.
Brittle if solemn for she could arouse,
By using dangerous eyes of raven hue,
Passions which changed men like the sorry crew
That Circe's spell condemned to herd with sows.
She kindled first the poet's "sweetest friend,"
Then fanned in quick succession other flames,
Till "the wide world" was conscious of her rays.
This is the tale that Shakespeare frankly penned
In certain sonnets (not disclosing names)
For grave biographers to blame or praise.

1914.

SHAKESPEARE'S WILL

A MAN'S own mind emerges in his will
Through legal mists, but Shakespeare's did not rise
Above his time or warrant him more wise
Than men of substance then were, or are still.
He purposed on his land, as on a hill,
To build his family in all men's eyes.
His boy had died, but he could still devise
Entails for daughters with prophetic skill.
For life he left Susanna his estate.
Then to her sons, then to his grandchild Bess,
To Judith then—and all the gifts entailed.
Susanna bore no boys, nor Bess; and Fate
Took Judith's sons untimely. Carefulness
Proved futile: all the limitations failed.

1912.

SHAKESPEARE'S LEGACIES

O THOMAS COMBE, I envy you that sword
 With Shakespeare's arms (perhaps) upon the hilt.
 And Judith Quiney, you devoutly hoard
 Your Father's bravest bowl in silver-gilt.
 Susanna Hall takes all the other plate,
 And his apparel goes to Mistress Hart,
 While Hemmyng, Burbage, Cundell, who were late
 His fellows in the players' mimic art,
 Receive memorial rings of apt design.
 And lastly comes an interlined bequest
 For widow Shakespeare, who does not decline
 Testator's bed—although the second best.
 Guard well your gear, O happy legatees,
 For antiquaries hang for things like these.

1913.

THE VINDICATORS OF SHAKESPEARE
 TO SIR GEORGE GREENWOOD, M.P.

WHEN, Greenwood, you assert that those who write
 On Shakespeare's life invariably place
 A heavy structure on a narrow base,
 And finding that the facts are few and slight,
 Indulge conjecture in unmeasured flight—
 You state the simple truth and prove your case.
 Indeed biographers must now efface
 The fabulous, and truth will come to light.
 But though you are unwilling to believe
 The author of the Plays and Poems made
 The hasty marriage, and the Philistine will,
 And stalked the sawdust stage, I cannot cleave
 In twain Ben Jonson's gentle friend who played
 In his own comedy of Bobadill.

1914.

OMAR KHAYYAM PENITENT

O MY Beloved, let the cup alone.
Bring me a sonnet. That will soothe my grief.
It is (so Wordsworth says) a myrtle-leaf,
A key, a lute, a lamp and a trombone
(Or trumpet) of soul-animating tone.
I will reform me, seeing life is brief,
The lamp will chase the night of unbelief,
The key unlock the door of the unknown,
And stirred by melody of pipe and lute
I doff my doubts and don the pilgrim's weeds,
And join the Faithful on their heavenward route.
But should the sonnet fail of promised fruit
Then I renounce for ever all the creeds,
And welcome Thee again, and Wine to boot.

1913.

PARISH REGISTERS

I KNOW you lived and died at Windermere
And there as blacksmith earned your daily bread,
And there an artless maiden chose to wed
Who made her mark while you without a smear
Inscribed your name. Your piety sincere
(Or was it hers?) gave to your sons, instead
Of fancy names or pagan, names I've read
In Holy Writ: Daniel the Frugal Seer,
Moses who pulverized the Golden Calf,
David the King, and Aaron the High Priest.
You left your widow little, but at least
A serviceable Sheffield-plated pot,
Which still survives. No more of wheat or chaff
Research can glean about your earthly lot.

1912.

A SNAP-SHOT

SHE did not face the fell photographer
With high resolve for once to mobilize
Her form and features, dimples, hair and eyes
For portraiture, and calmly register
A moment's pose to charm a worshipper.
Blame not such cautious action: not unwise
Are they who shun the portrait of surprise
And ask for notice, like a minister.
This maiden had none: snapped upon the sly
While swimming with the Naiads down the stream.
Behind the willows lurked the wily spy,
And caught her all unconscious of his scheme—
But with a mien no effort could supply,
And smiles that unexpected break and beam.

1915.

TO MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER W. W.

AT Chulmleigh born when George the Third was young,
 You came on horseback ¹ at the age of eight,
 To Plymouth, and alighting there to bait,
 For scores of years to the old borough clung.
 'Twas there we met, and there remain among
 Things I remember yet your jaunty gait,
 Tall figure, chestnut wig (not always straight),
 Your clear blue eyes, and your deliberate tongue
 Which charged me not to hurry, for you claimed
 That there was "plenty of time" for every man.
 Your age, you said, was free from cares and fears
 Because you had done no wrong, nor could be blamed
 By your calm conscience. Thus your race you ran,
 Outlived two wives, and lasted ninety years.

¹ In a panier.

THE ETON LATIN GRAMMAR

MY Eton Grammar taught that *Hic, haec, hoc,*
 Were Articles, and reckoned there were eight
 True parts of speech, and kept the ordered state
 Of cases in declension, like a flock
 In single file. Great Lily! what a shock
 Learning sustained when scholars reprobate
 Like Kennedy and Yonge annihilate
 The Article, derange the Cases, and dock
 The parts of speech, heedless of just rebuke.
 Beware of innovation! Notice how
 The fury soon invaded Church and State.
 Colenso pulverized the Pentateuch,
 Gladstone the Irish Church, and Asquith now
 Has sent the Welsh Church staggering to her fate.

1915.

LORIS LAMPAGO: AN APPRECIATION

PRIZE, O Pug, your coat of silver fawn
With sable points and toe-nails black as jet,
The gait of one unable to forget
His pedigree authentic and long-drawn;
Your cobby form which somewhat after dawn
Emerges from the cushions with regret
And haunts the fire when days are bleak and wet,
And in the summer sun adorns the lawn.
The stranger's footstep which eludes our sense
Your velvet ears detect, and so we learn
His advent from your short explosive yaps.
Your bark at sight of food shows joy immense
But still more joyous is your note perhaps
When human friends long absent home return.

1911.

SONNET ON SONNETS

TO build a sonnet in Italian style
 With interlacèd rhymes, and only two
 To man the octave, and contrive to do
 The sestet with two more may well beguile
 The curious rhymer, though he should revile
 The English bard who first essayed to woo
 Our Native Muse in forms far-fetched and new—
 To which she listened with a dubious smile.
 But when the sonneteer exultant climbs
 From out the debris of discarded rhymes
 And shows his shapely structure all complete
 Let him expect no praise, save what is meet
 For one who on the fire-irons plays the chimes,
 Or paints in oils a portrait with his feet.

1911.

THE ALCESTIS AT OXFORD

H EARKEN how the men of Oxford,
 Acting nightly for a week,
 Played Euripides the Human
 In his own authentic Greek.

Said Admetus, King of Pherae,
 "Great Apollo, hear me sigh!
 I am death-doomed by the Moirae,
 And I'm not prepared to die."

"Fateful Sisters," said Apollo,
 "You must spare Admetus' life;
 He's a most obliging fellow,
 And I quite admire his wife."

Then the Sisters half relented;
 They would spare the King, they said,
 If some imbecile consented
 To resign his life instead.

So Admetus asked his neighbours
 In succession if they'd mind
 Dying early to oblige him—
 But they one and all declined.

Proudly spake his spouse Alcestis,
 " No one loves him like his wife!
I will do what others dare not.
 Gaily I will give my life! "

Grisly Thanatos uprising
 Bore away the willing Queen.
In his lonely hall Admetus
 Wailed and felt supremely mean.

Enters Heracles the jovial,
 Hears Admetus wail his loss;
Swears to rescue sweet Alcestis,
 Or to throttle Thanatos.

What performed the feat we know not,
 Cunning, strength, or subtle charm,
But he soon returned triumphant
 With Alcestis on his arm.

Then Apollo joined the party,
 Leading in the Sisters Three.
There was laughter free and hearty
 And prodigious revelry.

Drinking, dancing, singing paeans,
Thus the hours of darkness went;
Pherae frescoed in vermilion
Showed how well the night was spent.

1887.

THE THAMES

SING, my gentle Muse I pray you
A delicious Summer song
Of the River where they say you
Linger all the summer long;

Of the Thames serenely flowing
Past his banks of wood or lawn,
Splendid when the sunset's glowing
And superb (no doubt) at dawn.

Of the men who haunt the waters,
Broad of breast and brown of hue,
And of Beauty's youngest daughters
Perched in punt or crank canoe.

Deck your hair with water-lilies,
Meadow-sweet and margin flowers—
Catch the sky-lark's note whose skill is
Unsurpassed—unless by ours.

Sing of every flower that blushes,
Sing of every bird that sings,
Sing of breeze-swept sedge and rushes,
Sing of forty thousand things.

THE THAMES

Should you fail to sing I spurn you,
And I shouldn't much object
Should a steam launch overturn you
On the river you neglect.

1887.

RETREAT

LET the gentle angler stand
 Knee-deep in water, rod in hand,
 And featly cast his specious fly
 While trout and time are fleeting by.

And let the keen pedestrian leave
 His bed at dawn and trudge till eve
 By dusty roads and shady lanes
 Until his welcome inn he gains.
 There let him of repose drink deep
 And count his miles and sink to sleep.

And let the ardent lover swear
 His idol's exquisitely fair,
 And let him tell in doleful rhyme
 How when she's absent lags old Time,
 Albeit her image will arise
 And hide all nature from his eyes.
 And let each mortal man pursue
 Some object he's a liking to.

RETREAT

But lay me in a mossy nook
Beside some unpretending brook,
Where the bending branches seem
To watch their shadows in the stream,
And let some blackbird—not too near—
Sing—not too oft—in accents clear.
But let no human mortal dare
To sing, or speak, or whisper there,
Nor any alien sound intrude
To mar the sylvan solitude.

1874.

MR. PEEL'S ACADEMY FOR
YOUNG GENTLEMEN

I MARVEL after all the threats
And namings that they've had o' me,
That members still use words too rough
For this select academy.

I long to see you one and all
Models of chaste deportment,
And all your language choicely culled
From a ladylike assortment.

If ministers refuse replies
Or stickle for formality,
Don't charge them with displaying whims
Or lackadaisicality.

If you should find your choicest bills
By Lords emasculated,
Sit still and never, never, say
That noble Lords *dictated*.

MR. PEEL'S ACADEMY

For Peers we know are too polite
To threaten or dictate to us;
And we should gratefully accept
What ministers may state to us.

I will prepare and put in type
During the Long Vacation
A manual of etiquette
For members' information,

Wherein you'll find in handy forms
(A neat and useful notion)
All the permitted epithets
For authorized emotion.

And if you disobey my book
(Which Mr. Smith will send you),
I gravely swear by Mace and Chair
I'll instantly suspend you.

1887.

THE EGO AND THE NON-EGO

1. I SIT on a bank and watch the glistering water.
The same breeze that fans me is coquetting with
the water, and the little ripples rise responsive.
2. I feel the ineffable sunshine on my cheek and the back
of my neck;
And I see the water sparkling, pervaded by the same
beams.
3. Then I tear off the manufactured rags and rubbish that
I wear—and that we all of us wear more or less.
Pausing a moment to enjoy the play of breeze and
sunshine, I plunge headlong and pass through
the water in a long shoot.
4. I see the stones and the weeds at the bottom and the fish
laying midway;
All is blue, misshapen, glorious.
5. Then rising I turn on my right side, while my left arm
cleaves the water, and my powerful legs propel
me.
Thus I wallow through the water rejoicing.
6. Later I stand on the bank erect with my hands clasped
at the back of my head:
I am languid and dripping.

7. Truly the Non-Ego is marvellous: the sunshine, the breeze, the water, and the subtle intimacy and distance that there is between them.

But this quivering frame, these muscles and bones every one of which I love, and which answer to my will: the Ego (I! Hang the Latin!) I, Walt Whitman, am a sight more marvellous.

8. I guess this is about it;
This is the truth.

1886.

OF GROWING OLD

FROM PIERRE DE RONSARD, 1524-1585

MY sportive youth is ended,
 My vaunted strength expended,
 My teeth are scarce and gray my head,
 My muscle fails, and in my veins
 No particle of blood remains,
 But only water tinted red.

Adieu my lyre, you girls adieu,
 My sweethearts once, each one of you.
 Farewell: I feel my steep decline.
 The pleasures of my youthful days
 Forsake my age which now betrays
 Desire for rest and warmth and wine.

For years and ailments congregate,
 And bow my head beneath their weight.
 Inhaling care with every breath,
 Halting or tottering on I glance
 Always behind me lest perchance
 I see approaching stealthy death,

Who may, it seems, at any hour
Conduct me to that dismal bower
 Where some infernal god doth reign,
Who keeps for guests of each degree
A cavern which you enter free
 But never more come out again.

1908.

THE CHEERFUL CYCLIST

O CHEERFUL Cyclist, wheeling wide
 With calves superb and faultless style,
 Forbear to scour the country side
 And tell me why you always smile:

And tell me why the winds that blow
 From any quarter that they list,
 Should limit their direction so
 And always head the bicyclist:

And why the hills we lightly fly
 Seem short and gradual to us,
 But when we mount them by-and-by
 They're lengthy and precipitous:

And why innumerable flies
 Surround my head, and bite and buzz
 As if in me they recognize
 The late lamented man of Uz:

And if you ever show disgust
 At ardent heat or pluvial flood,
 Or ever execrate the dust,
 Or maledictionize the mud:

THE CHEERFUL CYCLIST

And if you bless the drunken man
Who zig-zags in a parlous style—
Tell me all this, and if you can
Why you still wear that idiot smile.

1890.

IN PRAISE OF WHEELS

' *T* WAS noon and while assiduous bees
 Explored the heather where I lay,
 Intoning moral melodies,
 Two cyclists passed that way.

Nor foot nor wheel made sound or stir:
 But I was suddenly aware
 (As was the Ancient Mariner)
 Of voices in the air.

O, the poise and the pace of the silent wheel
 Through the luminous length of a summer day,
 When the sun shines bright and the breeze blows light
 And the mile-stones troop our way!

I've traversed oriental plains
 Astride the docile Arab steed,
 I've ridden every beast that reins
 Can guide or spurs can speed;

I've navigated seas and streams
 In every kind of craft that floats,
 Gigantic liners, octoremes,
 Canoes and cockle-boats.

I've swum the mountain tarn with ease,
I've figured free thereon in skates
Till its frozen superficies
Was all inscribed with dates.

Toboggans, switch-backs—things that slide—
Balloons (though this is indiscreet)
All modes of motion have I tried
Regardless of the heat.

The fertile future may reveal
Some vehicle more fit to sing,
But up to date the silent wheel
Beats every moving thing.

1890.

THE CHALLENGE

ALTHOUGH the sporting butcher-boy
Provoke a race, consent you not.
His saucy challenge may annoy
But cannot make you vastly hot.

I own the deed were good and fair
To bring this braggart to defeat,
And hear him shake the summer air
With words too sultry to repeat.

Unequal strife! For you it wears
The tissues, wastes the vital fires:
While he sits still and only swears
It is his pony that perspires.

1890.

THE PHOTOGRAPHING AT THE
HAUTBOY

ON a lawn beneath a rose-tree
 Sat a smiling white-clad maiden,
 And around her flock her comrades,
 Fair and free and dainty damsels.
 To them troop the well-groomed cyclists,
 Keen to share the fun and frolic.
 Then approaches Aremgera,
 Captain, sportsman, photográpher,
 With his cunning apparatus.
 Spell-bound stand both man and maiden
 For a solemn silent moment
 While the Captain makes a picture.
 Suddenly the silence ended,
 And the maidens rushed upon him
 Like the bees that swarm in summer,
 Asking him a hundred questions
 All about the operation.
 But the gallant Captain answered
 Nothing to their pointed questions.
 Silently he packed his dry-plates,

Slung them deftly on his shoulder,
Took his camera in one hand,
With the other grasped his tripod,
Steering with his teeth his safety,
Thus departed Aremgera.

1897.

THE LONDON BICYCLE CLUB

WHEN Eden first was made for man,
He gaily roamed the whole estate,
And little thought the risk he ran
In praying daily for a mate.

And Eve delighted him no doubt:
But after gladness came regret,
For he and she were soon turned out,
And Eden advertised To Let.

And now Eve's daughters do not scorn
To join our runs and share our tea,
And seek to wear—perhaps have worn—
The badge that marks the L.B.C.

Preserve your Club inviolate,
Though maidens sigh and matrons chide.
Remember Eden. Bar the gate,
With Beauty on the outer side.

1897.

LOVE ON A LINER

SHE is not touched by *mal de mer*
 As many maidens be,
 How kind the latter are and fair
 No mortal man can see.

For they what time the vessel rocks
 Grace never the saloon,
 Nor pace the deck in dainty frocks
 The breezy afternoon.

But she acquires on whom I wait
 At sea a fresher hue,
 A gayer laugh, a brisker gait,
 And franker manners too.

And constant joy possesses me
 Now that I understand
 This maiden's kinder on the sea
 Than when she was on land.

THE MAGIC MIRROR

THIS mental mirror fails to seize
The objects of this hemisphere:
The stately column, dome and frieze,
The crowd that hurries far and near.

But rises on its polished plane
A picture clear as April day
When sun succeeds to sudden rain—
A face a thousand leagues away.

1893.

L. L. R.

THE blackthorn breaks in flowery foam
This day we peal the wedding bell:
And never maiden left her home
With more to wish her passing well.

The sunshine gladdens all the town
Where many a friend recounts her praise
And renders her the sweet renown
Of kindly words and helpful ways.

And when the solemn words are said
Before the hushed but eager throng
Let music sound, and overhead
The skylarks scatter floods of song.

1894.

A MORNING AT BLANKENBERGHE

DAWN arrives, and somewhat later
 Cyclists occupy the Digue,
 Rapid Youth, and Age sedater
 Wheeling many a level league.

But the timid young *wielryder*
 Seeks the unfrequented beach,
 With a clinging coach beside her
 Proud to counsel and to teach.

Then the briny waves retreating,
 Leave a yellow plain of sand,
 Where a crowd of children meeting
 Toil untiring, spade in hand ;

While in scant but gaudy dresses
 Maidens frolicksome and free
 (Caps imprisoning their tresses)
 Scamper barefoot to the sea,

Joining there the portly German,
 Fleming broad and Frenchman brave,
 Who as venturesome as mermen
 Plunge their ankles in the wave.

But Britannia's fearless daughters,
Scorning paddlers on the shore,
Stoutly breast the rippling waters
For a hundred yards or more.

Bathing over, some are flitting
Up and down to take the air,
Others at the Cafés sitting
Tipple *bocks* and *petits verres*.

Till to joy of saint and sinner,
One o'clock is struck. At this
All the world adjourns for dinner,
Which your poet will not miss.

1898.

TO AMY AT SHANGHAI
A CHRISTMAS CARD

I F there 's Christmas East of Suez,
Though there be no Decalogue;
If the exiled Britons do as
Britons in their native fog,

May you share all mirth that 's going,
Sample all the Season's fare—
But remember England knowing
That your Poet toasts you there.

1906.

QUATRAINS

OMAR KHAYYAM POSITIVE

IN all the two-and-seventy creeds you find
 Some spark of immortality enshrined.
 But Omar Khayyam, unconvinced, declared
 That Life departs and leaves but dust behind:

For fabled Heaven make thou no sacrifice.
 Mark rather my example and advice:
 Seek slender damsels, roses, verses, wine,
 And enter NOW the Prophet's Paradise.

1899.

OMAR IMPIOUS

LET sour admonishers no longer shrug
 Their shoulders, or distort their features smug
 Because I pray not. I'll to holy mosque,
 And kneeling there—will steal a praying-rug.

1899.

OMAR IN AN AERATED-BREAD SHOP

SINCE life is brief, and wine for wealth alone,
 O maid with cheeks like roses newly-blown,
 And figure slender as your weekly wage,
 Bring me a cup of tea and half a scone.

1899.

OMAR AND THE SUNDAY LEAGUE

THE day the two-and-seventy sects regard
 As sacred, we unorthodox discard.
 Come then, O tulip-cheeked, to Leicester Square
 Where music flows but wine, alas, is barred.

1899.

OMAR TO A MOUNTAIN-HOTEL-KEEPER

RESPECT the altitude of your hotel,
 Nor let ambition cater worse than well.
 Better a crust of bread and jar of wine
 Than many courses, all inedible.

1908.

LIMERICKS

THE LIZARD

COMPLAINING of drought in the gizzard,
 A cyclist arrived at the Lizard,
 Where he mopped up the bars
 Stored with Martell's Three Stars,
 And left at the pace of a blizzard.

But when he slowed down at Gunwalloe,
 Still yearning for something to swallow,
 The landlady's daughter
 Advised soda water—
 Advice which he hastened to follow.

Then said he benignantly winking:
 "That Doctor is right to my thinking,
 Who still recommends
 In the matter of blends,
 That dilution should antedate drinking."

BICESTER

THERE was a young lady of Bicester,
Whose Vicar repeatedly kissed her.
When she asked, "Is it right?"
His reply was, "Oh quite!
I have often done so to my sister."

1894.

GUNWALLOE

I N the porch of the church of Gunwalloe,
Is the nest of a Wesleyan swallow,
Who believes that the priest
Is a pagan at least,
And probably worships Apollo.

1916.

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